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INFO RUEHZS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BANGKOK 002004

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/03/2016
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [TH](#)
SUBJECT: THAKSIN SAYS, "I WON"

Classified By: Ambassador Ralph L. Boyce reason 1.4 (b) (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Saying that essentially "I won," Prime Minister Thaksin appeared on an interview program on April 3 evening and outlined his view of the next steps to resolve the country's political impasse. Thaksin offered to form a "national reconciliation panel" to find ways of bringing peace to the country, even offering to step down if that body recommended so. The opposition has rejected this offer. The Election Commission has announced that it will hold rerun votes in 39 constituencies. The Peoples Alliance for Democracy (PAD) has petitioned the Administrative Court to annul the elections because of claimed irregularities in the polling process. Army Chief General Sonthi Boonyaratglin yesterday called the antagonists to stop involving the monarchy and the army in politics. Thaksin was reportedly heading to the Palace on April 4 afternoon. The audience is not unusual, but the fact of the meeting predictably is generating considerable speculation about what Thaksin will say, and do. End Summary.

¶2. (C) PM Thaksin appeared on an interview program Monday evening and outlined his view of the next steps to resolve the country's political impasse. Thaksin began by saying, essentially, "I won." He claimed that his Thai Rak Thai party had (unofficially) gotten 16 million of the party list votes (about 60 percent), while "only" about 10 million voters had chosen "no vote." (Note: The Election Commission (EC) has not officially released any election results yet. An EC told us that the PM's results were based on information gathered from TRT party representatives monitoring the vote count. End note.) The King's Principal Private Secretary, Asa Sarasin, claimed privately to the Ambassador on April 3 that the TRT miscounted the votes by roughly 2 million.

¶3. (SBU) The PM attempted to be somewhat conciliatory during parts of his television appearance. On the one hand, the PM tried to claim the moral high ground. "What should I say to my 16 million supporters if I step down now? What will come after me? Can you guarantee the situation will get better?" Thaksin said that his opponents would not be satisfied unless he was banned from politics forever.

¶4. (C) At the same time, Thaksin held out a bit of an olive branch. He said he envisioned this parliament lasting for about nine to 15 months to carry out constitutional reform, and then there would be new elections. He offered to set up a commission of retired PMs, judges and other leading citizens to study the political conflict and make suggestions about how to solve it. If the commission recommended that he resign in order to restore harmony, he would do it. However, there was no need for any royal intervention to name a successor. If he stepped aside, then another TRT member should step in as PM, since TRT had won the elections.

Thaksin repeatedly said he would gladly step aside for a break if the "mob" would pledge to end its demonstrations and participate in the next election. But under these conditions, the opposition has reacted to Thaksin's "offer" predictably, i.e. with considerable suspicion about his sincerity.

EC ANNOUNCES POLLS TO BE RERUN IN 39 CONSTITUENCIES

¶5. (C) The Election Commission announced yesterday that voting must be repeated in 39 constituencies in 16 provinces nationwide as 38 stand-alone candidates in 15 provinces have failed to win 20 percent of eligible voters and no election was run in a constituency in Nonthaburi after the disqualification of stand-alone candidate Pimpa Chanprasong from Thai Rak Thai. Election Commission officials have decided to register new candidates on April 8-9 and hold the rerun polls on April 23. (Note: this will give the TRT the opportunity to come up with new, most likely better-documented "opposition" opponents, thus giving their candidates an opportunity to overcome the 20 percent rule. These opponents may be challenged later, but their presence would allow the TRT candidates to "win" their districts with less than 20 percent of the eligible vote, take their seats in a full parliament and then only later be subject to investigation and by-elections. End note.) EC officials added that polling booths would not be re-positioned and the use of rubber stamps would continue for the upcoming re-elections.

PAD PETITIONS THE ADMINISTRATIVE COURT TO ANNUL THE APRIL 2 POLLS

¶6. (U) PAD on April 3 filed a petition with the Central Administrative Court to investigate the Election Commission for alleged violation of the election law. According to a PAD leader, the Election Commission violated Article 104 of

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the Constitution which provided that the election must be held by direct suffrage and secret ballot. He charged that numerous irregularities had been found in the April 2 election process, including the positioning of polling booths to allowed poll officials and members of public to see voters from behind while they cast their ballots. The PAD leader reportedly added that more lawsuits would be filed with the criminal court and the civil court against the Election Commission.

AND PLANS FURTHER PROTESTS

¶7. (C) Surat Horachaikul, a leader of the anti-Thaksin academic movement at Chulalongkorn University, told poloff that PAD plans a strategy meeting this week to discuss next steps. According to Surat, PAD wants to augment its "regular," generally Bangkok-based crowds with supporters from the south of Thailand (heavily anti-Thaksin), rural areas (traditionally Thaksin supporters) and student groups. The agenda will likely include a civil disobedience campaign against Thaksin's remaining in government, he added. As a post-script, Surat added that while Thaksin's determination to hang on despite the heavy "no vote" has unified the opposition, there are sharpened "north-south divisions" now among the national electorate.

ARMY CHIEF SAYS DO NOT TRY TO INVOLVE THE MONARCHY OR ARMY IN THIS

¶8. (U) Also on April 3, Army Chief General Sonthi Boonyaratglin called on all sides to stop trying to involve the monarchy and the army in politics. He said political problems must be solved by political means. General Sonthi denied the allegation made by PAD leader Sonthi Limthongkul, that the army had taken the government's side.

¶9. (C) Thaksin's defiant stand in the immediate aftermath of the election will galvanize his opponents to renew the struggle to force him to resign. To many observers here, the heavy "no vote" has badly shaken his claims for a mandate to stay in office and will make his attempts to set up a

national reconciliation panel a tough sell. If the TRT can more successfully legitimize their "opponents" in the upcoming round of reruns of the previous one-candidate races in Thailand's south, Thaksin may yet be able to seat a 500 member full Parliament that will be almost 100 percent Thai Rak Thai. This will not be the prescription for peace that he promises to bring back to Thailand's political landscape. We can expect considerable back-and-forth this week. Late today, all eyes are on Thaksin's audience with the King in Hua Hin. The audience in and of itself is not unusual, but will give some insight into Thaksin's immediate tactical approach.

BOYCE